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The Status of Virginia SROs: 2007

In the summer and fall of 2006, DCJS staff from the Virginia Center for School Safety conducted a canvass of Virginia's School Resource Officers (SROs). SROs are the uniformed, armed and sworn officers and deputies of local police departments and sheriffs' offices who are assigned, primarily, to Virginia's middle and high schools. SROs provide school security, serve as instructors of law-related education classes and act as crime prevention specialists, crime investigators, mentors, and role models.

SROs are distinct from School Security Officers (SSOs), the estimated 1,100 persons that local school divisions employ for security work. SSOs are not armed and do not have arrest powers. SROs are also distinct from DARE Officers, the estimated 100 sworn officers who work to educate our primary school students about the dangers of drug abuse and peer pressure.

All sheriffs' offices and police departments were contacted and those with SRO positions were asked to provide information on their SROs, SRO school assignments and SRO supervisors. Findings from the 2006 canvass and comparisons with those from the SRO canvass of 2004 are presented below. The 2006 canvass data is accurate for the date December 1, 2006.

Questionnaire and Sample

The canvass questionnaire was placed on an Internet website where it could be filled out and submitted online or printed off and filled in by hand. A letter of invitation and instruction was sent to all Chiefs of Police and Sheriffs who might have SRO positions on their agencies' rosters. Follow-up calls were made until a 100% response rate was achieved. Two-thirds of the Chiefs and Sheriffs submitted their responses online or by regular mail while the rest submitted theirs via fax or e-mail. The canvass revealed that 139 law enforcement agencies have SRO positions.

Canvass Findings: SRO Positions[1]

The first findings presented have to do with "SRO positions" and not the persons (SROs) who occupy or fill these positions. Ideally, a SRO position is one where the assigned officer/deputy reports to a single school five days a week and spends 75% or more of his/her time on the grounds of this school. We believe this is true of most SRO positions. Some agencies, however, require SROs to only be at their assigned schools for part of the workday and to patrol or fulfill other agency duties during the

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[1] A SRO position is defined by the school(s) where a SRO is assigned. A jurisdiction's number of SRO positions is based on the number of schools that responding agencies reported as the "primary school assignments" of their SROs. Larger agencies may assign SRO-trained officers or deputies to SRO-floater positions so that SROs are at schools when the regularly assigned SROs are on vacation, on sick leave, in court, etc. These persons are not included in the count of SROs or SRO positions.

other part. Other SROs have so many school incidents to deal with that much of their time is spent investigating crimes and attending court sessions. Still others are assigned to multiple schools. These facts must be considered in any interpretation of our findings.

1. *Number of SRO Positions*

   The current number of agency SRO positions in Virginia is 574, an increase of 44 positions (8%) since the last SRO canvass was taken in the summer and fall of 2004.

2. *Changes in the Number of SRO Positions in Virginia Localities*

   Between December 2004 and December 2006, thirty-three (33) localities added 64 SRO positions to their law enforcement agencies. Seventeen (17) other localities eliminated 20 SRO positions. Although sheriffs and chiefs were not asked why their agencies added or eliminated positions, it is generally believed that post-2003 reductions in federal and state monies for SROs lead to the reductions while the building of new schools and an acknowledged need for SROs lead to the additions.

3. *Localities that Added SRO Positions in the Last Two Years*

Norfolk City	+10	Richmond City	+2	Isle of Wight	+1
Newport News City	+6	Smyth County	+2	Louisa County	+1
Fairfax County	+5	Bristol City	+1	Manassas City	+1
Chesterfield County	+3	Charlottesville City	+1	Martinsville City	+1
Spotsylvania County	+3	Clinchco Town	+1 New	Middlesex County	+1 New
Russell County	+3	Col. Beach Town	+1	Patrick County	+1
Fauquier County	+2	Cumberland County	+1	Pittsylvania County	+1
Henrico County	+2	Essex County	+1	Pulaski County	+1
Loudoun County	+2	Frederick County	+1	Richmond County	+1 New
Mecklenburg County	+2	Greene County	+1	Staunton City[2]	+1 New
Pr. William County	+2	Hopewell City	+1	Williamsburg City	+1

4. *Localities that Eliminated SRO Positions in the Last Two Years*

Arlington County	-2	Fairfax City	-1	Petersburg City	-1
Franklin City	-2	Galax City	-1	Shenandoah County	-1
Rockingham County	-2	Leesburg Town	-1	Smithfield Town	-1
Bluefield Town	- 1	Mathews County	-1	Strasburg Town	-1
Craig County	-1	New Kent County	-1	Vinton Town	-1
Culpepper County	-1	Northampton County	-1		

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[2] This increase resulted from the new SRO position at the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind.

5. *Types of Agencies with SRO Positions*

	Agencies	SRO Positions	Percent
County Sheriffs' Offices	78	235	41%
County Police Departments	9	149	26%
City Police Departments	32	169	29%
City Sheriffs' Offices	1	1	0%
Town Police Departments	16	21	4%
VA School for Blind and Deaf	1	1	0%
	137	574	100%

6. *SRO Positions by Primary School Assignment*

The questionnaire asked respondents to provide the "primary school assignment" given to the deputies or officers who filled their SRO positions. These were reported as follows:[3]

High Schools	286	50%
Middle Schools	226	39%
Elementary Schools	13	2%
Alternative Schools	12	2%
Centers (Learning, Tech., Career)	12	2%
Intermediate Schools	5	1%
Combined Schools	4	0.5%
Academies	4	0.5%
Others/Missing Data	12	2%
	574	100%

7. *SRO Positions that Serve One or More Schools[4]*

SRO positions serving only **one** school:	431	75%
SRO positions serving **two** schools:	133	24%
SRO positions serving **three** schools:	3	1%
SRO positions serving **four or more** schools:	7	1%
	574	100%

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[3] The number of high schools includes Senior High Schools and the number of middle schools includes Junior High Schools

[4] The canvass asked respondents to list their SROs' primary and secondary school assignments. This data reveals that about 25% of Virginia SROs serve or cover multiple schools.

8. *Estimated Percentage of Virginia High Schools and Middle Schools Served?*

      High schools served: 284/300 or 95%

      Middle schools served: 227/308 or 74%

9. *Counties and Cities whose Law Enforcement Agencies have no SRO Positions*

      Counties*:* Amelia, Bath, Charles City, Craig, Highland, Nottoway, Scott, and Surry.

      Cities*:* Buena Vista, Emporia, Franklin, Galax, Lexington, and Poquoson.

The percentage of Virginia's 134 counties (95) and cities (39) with SROs is 89% (121/134).

10. *Town Police Departments with SRO Positions*

Department	County where Town is Located	Number of SROs
Blacksburg Town PD	Montgomery County	2
Christiansburg Town PD	Montgomery County	1
Clinchco Town PD	Dickenson County	1
Colonial Beach Town PD	Westmoreland County	1
Dublin Town PD	Pulaski County	1
Haysi Town PD	Dickenson County	1
Honaker Town PD	Russell County	1
Lebanon Town PD	Russell County	1
Leesburg Town PD	Loudoun County	4
Luray Town PD	Page County	1
Pound Town PD	Wise County	1
Pulaski Town PD	Pulaski County	1
Rocky Mount Town PD	Franklin County	1
Tazewell Town PD	Tazewell County	1
West Point Town PD	King William County	1
Woodstock Town PD	Middlesex County	2
		21

11. Number of SRO Positions per County or City

Number of SRO Positions[5]	Counties and Cities		
52	Fairfax Co. PD		
29	VA Beach City PD		
25	Chesterfield Co. PD		
21	Henrico Co. PD		
18	Loudoun Co. SO		
17	Chesapeake City PD		
16	Prince William Co. PD		
15	Norfolk City PD		
12	Roanoke City PD	Spotsylvania Co. SO	
11	Hampton City PD	Newport News City PD	
9	Arlington Co. PD	Richmond City PD	Roanoke Co PD
8	Hanover Co. SO	Montgomery Co	
7	Albemarle Co PD	Campbell Co. SO	Frederick Co. SO
	Stafford Co. SO		
6	Alexandria City	Danville City	Russell Co
	Botetourt Co	Fauquier Co	Wise Co
5	Bedford Co	Dickenson Co	Lynchburg City
	Culpeper Co	Giles Co	Pittsylvania Co
	Shenandoah Co		
4	Amherst Co	James City Co	Pulaski Co
	Augusta Co	Manassas City	Rockingham Co
	Buchanan Co	Mecklenburg Co	Suffolk
	Charlottesville City	Patrick Co	Warren Co
	Gloucester Co	Portsmouth City	Washington Co
	Henry Co	Powhatan Co	York Co
3	Franklin Co	Louisa Co	Smyth Co
	Hopewell City	Orange Co	Staunton City
	Isle of Wight Co	Page Co	Tazewell Co
	King William Co	Prince George Co	Wythe Co

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[5] County figures include SRO positions of incorporated towns.

Number of SRO Positions[5]	Counties and Cities		
2	Accomack Co	Dinwiddie Co	Martinsville City
	Alleghany Co	Essex Co	Northampton Co
	Appomattox Co	Fredericksburg City	Petersburg City
	Bedford City	Grayson Co	Prince Edward Co
	Bristol City	Greene Co	Sussex Co
	Brunswick Co	Greensville Co	Waynesboro City
	Buckingham Co	Harrisonburg City	Westmoreland Co
	Caroline Co	King George Co	Williamsburg City
	Carroll Co	Lunenburg Co	Winchester City
	Colonial Heights City	Manassas Park City	
1	Bland Co	Goochland Co	New Kent Co
	Charlotte Co	Halifax Co	Northumberland Co
	Clarke Co	King and Queen Co	Norton City
	Covington City	Lancaster Co	Radford City
	Cumberland Co	Lee Co	Rappahannock Co
	Fairfax City	Madison Co	Richmond Co
	Falls Church City	Mathews Co	Rockbridge Co
	Floyd Co	Middlesex Co	Salem City
	Fluvanna Co	Nelson Co	Southampton Co

Canvass Findings: Persons who Filled the SRO Positions

The findings below are based on the names of the persons who were reported to be SROs in the 2004 and 2006 SRO canvasses.

12. SRO Professional Retention Rate (62%)

Three hundred and eighteen (318) SROs who were listed as serving in the 516 occupied SRO positions in December 2004 were also listed as SROs in December 2006. This constitutes a 62% professional retention rate for Virginia SROs over this two-year period.

13. SRO Turnover-in-Position Rate (43%)

Data from the two canvasses indicate that by December 2006, 43% of the 2004 SROs either left the profession or were no longer assigned to the school or schools where they were serving two years earlier.

Several factors must be considered when calculating a SRO turnover rate, i.e., the percentage of SROs who leave their positions during a given period of time.   First, "turnover" must be defined. In this report, turnover is defined as a change in the personnel occupying specific SRO positions during the

two year period from December 2004 to December 2006. Any single SRO position is defined by the school(s) where the SRO who occupies the position is assigned. In this study, a position is identified by what the responding agencies reported as the "primary school assignment" for each of their SRO positions.

In addition, for turnover to be a possibility, a SRO position must be occupied at the beginning of the test period and remain in existence at the end of the period. Surprisingly, only 451 positions met this criterion. The reduction from 530 positions in 2004 to the 451 positions that still existed in 2006 occurred for the following reasons:

- 15 of the December 2004 positions were unoccupied, making them unsuitable for the study of SRO turnover,
- 21 of the 2004 positions were eliminated during the two-year period, and
- SROs in 42 of the positions had, by December 2006, been reassigned to newly created positions or to schools that were not listed among the primary school assignments reported in 2004 canvass.[6] These latter positions were removed from the calculation of SRO turnover because they no longer existed as primary school positions in 2006.

Only 258 (57%) of the persons assigned to SRO positions in December 2004 (n=451) were identified as SROs in December 2006. This constitutes a SRO position turnover rate of 43% over the two-year period. Given that SROs are thought to do a better job of preventing school crime when they have had time to familiarize themselves with the students and culture of the schools they serve, this high rate of turnover is potentially problematic.

14. SRO Gender

Based on the SRO names provided by the two canvasses, the data show that males still dominate the SRO profession. In 2004, males constituted 83% of the SRO population and in 2006 they constituted 86%.

15. SRO School Assignment

Between 2004 and 2006, there was a slight change in the type of schools to which SROs were being assigned. In 2004, 54% of the SROs had primary school assignments at high schools or senior high schools. In 2006, this percentage *declined* to 50%. In 2006, 36% of the SROs had primary school assignments at middle schools or junior high schools. In 2006, this percentage increased to 39%. Assignments to elementary schools increased from 2% to 3% during period while assignment to alternative schools remained at 2%.

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[6] One finding of this study that was surprising was the degree to which agencies changed the primary school assignments of their SROs. For example, Arlington County's police department reported 6 high schools, 2 middle schools, and 2 elementary schools as SRO primary school assignments in 2004 but reported 4 high schools and 4 middle schools as their SRO's primary school assignments in 2006. This change generally involved assigning more SROs to middle-schools.

Summary

Information from the 2006 canvass suggests that the profession of SRO has become an important feature of local law enforcement and public schools. From the initial entry into Virginia's schools in the 1970s and 1980s, to it's dramatic growth following the school shootings of 1998-2001, the idea of placing sworn officers in public schools has steadily gained acceptance. Research from Virginia and other states indicates that law enforcement officers, school officials and citizens support the concept. The elimination of 20 positions in the last two years occurred mainly in small jurisdictions whose policing resources are often stressed and whose schools are relatively small. On the other hand, the significant increase in SRO positions has paralleled the growth of Virginia's population and the need for more schools. The fact that SRO positions have increased quite automatically as new schools have been constructed is testament to the value with which this relatively new law enforcement profession is perceived.

The data also suggests that not everyone who agreed or wanted to become a SRO found it to be an acceptable career path. Without exit surveys or field research, the specific reasons why SROs are leaving their jobs cannot be known with certainty. The 43% turnover-in-position rate indicates, however, that research on the types of people most likely to prosper as SROs and on the kinds of institutional and environmental factors that may make the profession less stable or attractive is needed.